
Appendix 1 – Response from entity

Response from the NSW Reconstruction Authority

NSW Reconstruction Authority



Mr Bola Oyetunji
Auditor-General
Audit Office of NSW

Courtesy copy: Andrew Anderson, Director, Performance Audit

Re: NSW Reconstruction Authority Response to the Performance audit – Resilient Homes Program and Resilient Lands Program

Dear Mr Oyetunji,

I welcome and accept in full the findings and five recommendations of the final performance audit report on the Resilient Homes Program (RHP) and Resilient Lands Program (RLP). Further, I can advise that work is underway against all recommendations (further outlined at **Attachment A**).

As the Chief Executive Officer of the Reconstruction Authority, I am committed to the delivery of these programs for communities in the Northern Rivers and Central West and to integrate lessons into future program design and delivery.

The programs were established in 2022 and the Reconstruction Authority assumed responsibility in August 2023. In considering the extraordinary circumstances faced at the time these programs were developed and delivered, it is evident that the design and scale of these programs was a first for NSW. It is acknowledged that better initial program planning would have reduced the likelihood of delays when compared to the original timeframes. As the report outlines, RA has administered both programs in line with established guidelines and has not found any significant issues with the way program funding has been administered and expended.

While there have been delays and challenges in delivery; the intent of these programs is considered positive for the long-term recovery of impacted communities.

One of the key insights RA has observed from the delivery challenges of the RHP and RLP, is the benefit of addressing land use planning issues before a disaster occurs. This is reflected in the objectives of the *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022* and the legislative powers of the RA, which are intended to provide a focus for government on long term mitigation and adaptation planning, and enable communities across NSW to realise the long-term benefits that these can bring.

The RA remains committed to building resilience in communities through its disaster mitigation, adaptation, preparedness and recovery functions. Our role in the delivery of programs such as the RHP and RLP, on behalf of the NSW Government, remains a critical element of this commitment.

Finally, I would also like to make special mention of the work undertaken by our staff, councils, and delivery partners across the RHP and RLP. I am confident that this work demonstrates service and commitment to the Northern Rivers and Central West communities. I am proud of the work achieved to date by current staff of the Reconstruction Authority. It is my responsibility to ensure that our staff and partners continue to be supported through effective decisions and resources to deliver.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kate Fitzgerald".

Kate Fitzgerald
Chief Executive Officer
NSW Reconstruction Authority

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1

Recommendation	Comment
1) By September 2026, the NSW Reconstruction Authority should identify and act on opportunities to accelerate the delivery of sites under the Resilient Lands Program, to ensure current program timelines and targets are met.	<p>RA accepts this recommendation in full. Implementation of this recommendation is in progress.</p> <p>During the period leading up to the finalisation of this report, the two priority sites in North Lismore and East Lismore which the RA is directly responsible for delivery of, have transitioned to the delivery phase with our delivery partners at HomesNSW and Landcom.</p> <p>The RA is now focused on the review the remainder of the RLP sites to identify and act on opportunities to accelerate the delivery of sites as per this recommendation.</p> <p>This will include a review of the current program timelines and targets to ensure these are clearly articulated and defined and able to be met over the remaining life of the RLP.</p>
2) By June 2027, the NSW Reconstruction Authority should work with councils to finalise and implement plans for: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> each of the areas with significant numbers of buybacks parcels of bought-back land that are isolated from other buyback sites. 	<p>RA accepts this recommendation in full. Implementation of this recommendation is in progress.</p> <p>RA agrees that working collaboratively with local councils to finalise plans for areas with significant numbers of buybacks, as well as those isolated sites, is critical to achieving intended program outcomes and supporting long term community resilience.</p> <p>RA acknowledges that comprehensive place-based planning for areas impacted by buybacks was not undertaken as part of the design of the Resilient Homes Program.</p> <p>The report recognises that RA is already working with local councils and state government departments, as well as other stakeholders, to determine preferred land uses. RA is actively progressing a structured, council-led planning approach for priority locations with high concentrations of buybacks.</p> <p>Procurement processes have now been completed and consultants engaged for the planning process for the two largest areas covering Lismore and South Murwillumbah, and briefs for further engagements are being finalised across the remaining areas of concentrated buybacks.</p> <p>RA has sought and recently received confirmation from NEMA on the permissible zonings and land use controls for the RHP buybacks using the existing NSW Floodplain Risk Management framework.</p>

Recommendation	Comment
	<p>RA is concurrently working with local councils to develop the process for the rezoning, divestment of land, and future land use considerations for the remaining isolated buyback sites so that this can be finalised by June 2027.</p>
3) By June 2027, the NSW Reconstruction Authority should document lessons learned to inform planning for future disaster resilience, recovery and adaptation programs, including land use planning activities	<p>RA accepts this recommendation in full. Implementation of this recommendation is in progress.</p> <p>RA has considered lessons learned from the delivery of recent disaster resilience, recovery and adaptation programs to inform the design of future initiatives, including land-use planning activities. These lessons emphasise the importance of early intervention, coordinated decision making, and policies that support safe, long term housing outcomes in disaster affected areas.</p> <p>In developing and refining its approach, RA also had regard to research commissioned by the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation (NRRC) and completed by the Southern Cross University and the University of Technology Sydney, <i>A Best Practice Framework: Housing in Disaster-Affected Areas – From Crisis to Long-Term Resilience</i>. The research identifies key lessons across the disaster recovery lifecycle and outlines six recommendations focused on improving housing outcomes, governance, community engagement, and long-term resilience.</p> <p>The findings and recommendations in this research have informed RA’s thinking and were considered in shaping its response to the recent Mid Coast flood event. In particular, the research reinforces the importance of clear recovery pathways for displaced households, alignment between recovery programs and land-use planning, and the need to balance urgency of response with long term risk reduction and resilience objectives.</p> <p>RA will continue to draw on evidence-based research, post event reviews, and program evaluations to inform the planning and continuous improvement of future disaster resilience, recovery, and adaptation programs, ensuring they support sustainable recovery outcomes for communities and reduce exposure to future hazard risks.</p>
4) By June 2027, the NSW Reconstruction Authority should ensure readiness for future natural disasters by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> developing and implementing resilience and adaptation programs in anticipation of natural disasters and outside periods of declared natural disaster 	<p>RA accepts this recommendation in full. Implementation of this recommendation is in progress.</p> <p>RA agrees that resilience and adaptation programs should be planned, developed and maintained in readiness for future natural disasters, outside periods of declared disaster and separate from response and immediate recovery efforts.</p> <p>RA is progressing actions to embed this approach, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progressing the actions identified in the State Disaster Mitigation Plan and the development of regional Disaster Adaptation Plans across NSW.

Recommendation	Comment
<p>b. planning in advance for the timely implementation of disaster recovery programs, including meeting requirements for business cases and cost-benefit analyses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing standing program frameworks and delivery models for resilience and adaptation interventions that can be activated when required. • Strengthening cross agency coordination to align resilience planning with land use, housing, infrastructure and climate adaptation strategies. • Incorporating lessons learned from the RHP and RLP into future program design guidance and internal assurance processes. • Working with central agencies to ensure future resilience investments are supported by appropriate planning and business case documentation, proportionate to program scale and risk.
<p>5) By March 2028, the NSW Reconstruction Authority should complete and publish the evaluation and ex-post cost-benefit analysis of the Resilient Homes Program and the Resilient Lands Program.</p>	<p>RA accepts this recommendation in full. Implementation of this recommendation is in progress.</p> <p>The Resilient Homes Program and the Resilient Lands Program are currently subject to a comprehensive program evaluation, including an ex-post cost-benefit analysis. The evaluation is being undertaken by ARDT and is presently underway.</p> <p>The final evaluation report is expected to be delivered in late 2027, at which point the findings will be considered for publication in line with NSW Government evaluation and reporting requirements as well as proactive release obligations under the GIPA Act.</p>